Narratives of Single Working Women in Dhaka City

BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health's (BRAC University) Centre for Gender and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (CGSRHR) developed a short documentary which is a collection of narratives of single working women in Dhaka city. The film is based on the findings of a Share-Net International-funded project titled "Where Do They Go? Accessibility of SRHR Services of Single Working Women in Urban Bangladesh". Researchers collected stories from unmarried women who live and work in Dhaka city; the purpose was to understand the challenges they face and choices they make in order to navigate their lives in a society that often overlooks their sexual reproductive health and rights. We also developed a theatre script on the same topic based on the same topic in collaboration with Bahnishikha-Unlearn gender who does theatrical performances on gender issues.

Dissemination:

We hosted a film screening on March 4th, 2019 at BRAC Centre. Around hundred guests were invited which included representatives from organisations, NGO. INGOs who work on SRHR. The screening was followed by a short Q&A session with research participants who were also featured in the short documentary. The participants included three women who live in work in Dhaka and shared their experiences about challenges navigating SRHR services in the country. The floor was opened to audience members were asked the participants and the researchers questions about the film, their own lives, and what inspired them to take on this film project. Audience members asked those on stage how they cope with the challenges they face and share their own stories and how they try to overcome the challenges they face as women in Dhaka.

During the panel discussion, Dr. Sabina Faiz Rashid, Dean, BRAC JPGSPH said, “Although these [challenges] do not simply go away, there are still changes that allow us to cope in various ways, including what we are doing now – discussing it openly and challenging existing discourse around these issues.”

The interactive session between the audience and panelists was followed by a theatrical performance by the group Bonhishikha ("Unlearn Gender") which was also developed from the interviews. Bonhishikha – unlearn gender believes that gender stereotypes with roles constrain the potential of individuals by holding them back. Their performances are based on real-life incidents and stories collected from women and girls from around Dhaka. They developed one piece on single working women of Dhaka city based on some interviews from the project.

The film was screened again at the School on the occasion of International Women’s Day on March 10, 2019.

How did the project go? Why was there a delay?

Due to the stigma and shame around sex and sexuality in Bangladeshi society, there was a slight delay in implementing this research project mainly due to various limitations in recruiting participants; most were selected through snowball sampling however, several of the participants who had previously committed to being interviewed on camera cancelled at the last minute because they no longer felt comfortable talking about essentially “taboo” subjects. Moreover we could film any interviews in the Month of December due to the National Election that held at the end of the month. This
significantly decreased the number of participants in the study as well as effectively using the time given to complete this project.

**Lessons learnt: Ideas on the future**

Due to limitations in the sampling and recruitment of participants, we [the researchers] later came to realize that instead of exclusively filming all the interviews, we should have also conducted interviews off camera because that in itself turned out to be a major barrier in a) including enough women from across all socioeconomic status in Bangladesh and b) caused a lot of the participants to cancel last minute as they did not want to be filmed while talking about SRHR-related and personal topics. This way we could have still collected a larger breadth of data about single working women’s lived experiences in Dhaka and then later incorporated them in the film in other creative ways (ie, dramatized re-enactments or animation with voiceovers).

We got many suggestion and asked to make a sequel of the video which will include men’s perspective on the issue. We have already started looking for funding for that.

**What has been done with the video?**

**Social Media Statistics:**

- **YouTube link:** [https://youtu.be/yf7H5Y6sE7A](https://youtu.be/yf7H5Y6sE7A)
  3,912 views since posting the video on March 31, 2019; 159 Likes and 10 Comments

- **Facebook link shared:** [https://www.facebook.com/BRACJPGSPH/posts/2095753777207280](https://www.facebook.com/BRACJPGSPH/posts/2095753777207280)
  7,900+ people reached; 266 Likes, 211 Shares, 50+ Comments

Beyond being very positively received at the launch event on March 4, 2019 and since making the rounds on social media (YouTube, Facebook), the video has also been used at various educational institutions including the following –

a) At the American International School in Dhaka (AIS/D Bangladesh), students from 7th-12th grade were shown the video during their home room sessions and took part in group discussions about the content in the video with their classmates and homeroom teachers. One student from Egypt even shared that women in her country experience the same type of stigmatization for being single in their society so she found the video very relevant. Teachers also reported that students all participated in very lively discussions with each other and a few even went home and shared the video with their parents.

b) Two local NGOs called Kotha (meaning “Talk” in English) and Yellow Brick Road (YBR) who are working on SRHR education with urban Bangladeshi youth at various schools have been provided with the video as they shared an interest to use the short documentary as a teaching tool during sessions where they discuss gender, marriage, relationships and societal norms with adolescents.
Pictures from Film Screening on March 4th, 2019: Panel Discussion.